

Belize Birding & Nature

With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



March 6–13, 2021

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Tour Highlights

- Treat yourself to a real vacation at two of the best eco-lodges in the Neotropics
- Enjoy three nights at the beautiful Lamanai Outpost Lodge, just a stroll away from impressive Maya ruins
- Bird the forest canopy from above, atop two stunning Maya temples
- Explore bird-rich lagoons by boat to find Snail Kite and colorful wading birds
- Traverse the trails of famous Chan Chich Lodge in search of trogons, parrots, toucans, and more
- Wake to the noisy chorus of tinamous, forest-falcons, and motmots, right outside your door
- Take night excursions in search of bats, night birds, and maybe even a Margay, Ocelot, or Jaguar!
- Opt for a post-tour extension to the famous Mayan ruins at Tikal and the pristine reserve of Las Guacamayas, Biological Station - highly recommended!

Tour Summary

8-Day / 7-Night Belize Birding & Nature Tour w/
James P. Smith & local lodge guides
\$3890 from Belize City
Airport is Philip SW Goldson International (BZE)

and the smile of your guide. The transfer in to Lamanai Outpost Lodge is FUN and starts your trip with some great birding action. We first travel a short way by van and then switch to a boat. From the boat, we should see Mangrove Swallow, Limpkin, Northern Jacana, Swallow-tailed and Snail Kites, and, with luck, a Black-collared Hawk or a huge Jabiru Stork. Be ready with a windbreaker, camera, and binoculars. We arrive in time for late-afternoon birding by the lodge, followed by dinner.

Lamanai (Mayan for “submerged crocodile”), is located at the edge of a 28-mile spring-fed lagoon and offers rainforest, Maya ruins, pine savannahs, freshwater marshes, and open water habitats, all within walking distance. Over 400 species have been counted here, including Thicket Tinamou, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Jabiru Stork, King Vulture, Zone-tailed Hawk, Ruddy Crane, White-fronted Parrot, Squirrel Cuckoo, and Northern Bentbill. Otters, manatees, crocodiles, and the occasional Jaguar are also nearby.

Just a two-hour flight from Miami, Belize offers a rich blend of Maya ruins and lush forests, still wild enough to host Jaguars and a diversity of tropical birds, butterflies, and mammals. This nation’s warm, hospitable people speak English and have a strong tradition of caring for their biological legacy.

We are pleased to offer time at two of Belize’s finest and best-known naturalists’ lodges: Lamanai Outpost Lodge and Chan Chich Rainforest Lodge, situated in reserves and protected forests. With a two-lodge trip our goal is to keep logistics simple, providing you with time to savor the lodges’ rich natural history, abundant birds, pleasant creature comforts, and tasty food.

Join us to explore Belize’s biological treasures and cultural roots. We emphasize birding, but also examine natural history and Maya heritage while having some simple, relaxing fun. We enjoy extended time at each lodge to ease travel and soak in the special attributes that give them such fine reputations. Colorful resident birds are joined by winter migrants, making birding each day extraordinary and fun!

Itinerary

Sat., Mar. 6 Arrivals | Lamanai Outpost Lodge

Start your adventure with ease. The Belize City airport is small and welcoming, and you are greeted by tropical air

Forest trails and Maya ruins are easily accessed at Lamanai; birds and butterflies always seem to be at arm's length. Just a short stroll from the lodge stands the Temple of the Jaguar and the High Temple, two of about 700 Maya structures at Lamanai that were hidden under a blanket of earth and vegetation until their excavation began in 1974. These ruins date back two millennia. Climbing the temples requires a bit of effort, but the reward is great: a bird's-eye view over the forest canopy.

Accommodations at Lamanai Outpost Lodge (D)

Sun., Mar. 7 Lamanai Outpost Lodge

Whether you're well-traveled in Central America or visiting for the first time, there is much to hold your attention at Lamanai. Birds and monkeys busy themselves around the cabins; nearly 200 species of butterflies flit through the area, colorful dragonflies and damselflies buzz by, lizards ranging in size from tiny geckoes to five-foot-long iguanas lounge around, and of course, numerous herbs, shrubs, and trees attract wild tropical wonder.

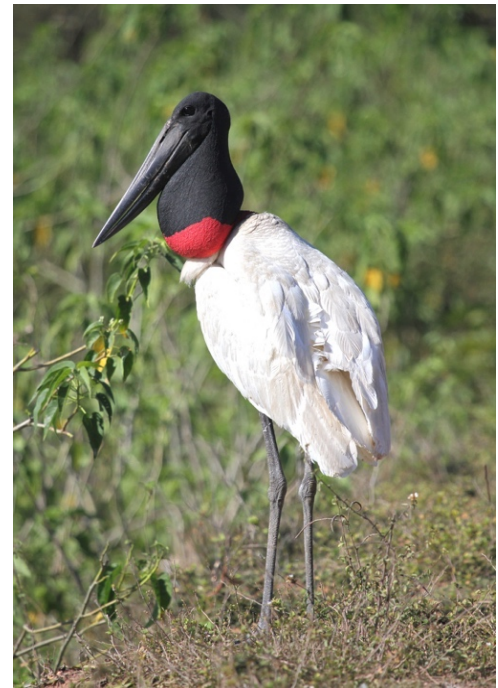
We're mindful of some of the regional endemics, including Black Catbird, Rose-throated Tanager, Yucatan Jay, and Gray-throated Chat. One of the most interesting phenomena, and one we are likely to encounter at Lamanai and Chan Chich, is an army ant march. Birds of many families attend these marches, eating the insects, frogs, lizards, and other organisms flushed by the foraging ants. Standing quietly at the margin of an ant swarm, we get close looks at faithful ant followers, including Gray-headed Tanager, Red-throated Ant-Tanager, and a number of woodcreepers, including Tawny-winged and Northern Barred. Other possibilities are White-whiskered Puffbird, several flycatchers, migrant warblers, and perhaps a Great Tinamou. Even birds of prey like the dainty Barred Forest-Falcon follow ant swarms—all so absorbed in the sea of insect life that they ignore our fascinated observation.

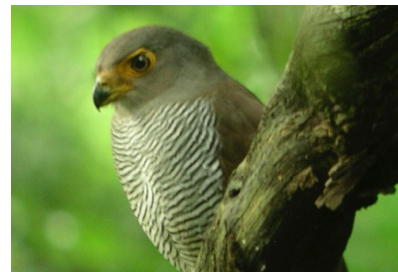
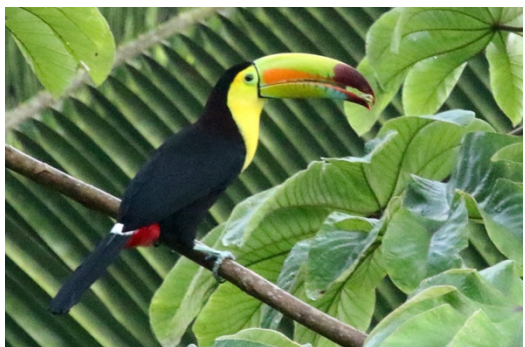
Accommodations at Lamanai Outpost Lodge (B,L,D)

Mon., Mar. 8 Lamanai Outpost Lodge

Overlooking the edge of the large New River Lagoon, Lamanai offers a different mix of birds from Chan Chich, our second lodge. Some birds at the water's edge are familiar: Neotropic Cormorant, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, and Purple Gallinule. Others, like White-collared Seedeater, Mangrove Vireo, Ruddy Crake, or the delightful American Pygmy Kingfisher remind you that you have left the United States. Open-air dining lets you be immersed in nature; local foods and tropical fruits abound!

During our stay we take several boat trips. Canoe excursions offer relaxing and intimate wildlife views, and can be arranged for both day and night paddles. Such trips frequently produce an endangered Morelet's Crocodile, iguanas, and basilisk lizards, up to five species of kingfishers, Boat-billed Heron, Gray-necked Wood-Rail, and





occasionally a rarity like an Agami Heron. At night, with the aid of spotlights, we look for several species of bats, Yucatan Nightjar, Yucatan Poorwill, and Northern Potoo.

We also make sure to have time to see the impressive Lamanai Maya Ruins, and to explore the open savanna habitat, which affords us a good mix of species including Yucatan Woodpecker, Yellow-lored Parrot, the Petén race of Botteri's Sparrow, and occasionally Aplomado Falcon.

Accommodations at Lamanai Lodge (B,L,D)

Tues., Mar. 9 Lamanai Outpost Lodge to Chan Chich Lodge

We enjoy a last morning of birding and breakfast at Lamanai Outpost Lodge before departing by van shuttle to Chan Chich Lodge. This is largely a travel day, on back roads through Mennonite farming country; we do stop for some birding along the way as the opportunity presents itself, and take a break at a small country store. We bring snacks, and plan on a late lunch upon arrival at the lodge.

Chan Chich (Maya for "little bird") is one of the premier birding lodges in the world, located near the very remote coffee and livestock producing community of Gallon Jug. En route, we watch for Crested Caracara and other birds of prey, Scissor-tailed and Fork-tailed Flycatchers, and flooded fields that attract waterfowl, large wading birds, and migrating shorebirds.

Chan Chich Rainforest Lodge, set in a Maya Plaza dating from the Classic Maya Period of 250 – 800 AD, is located within the 250,000 acre Rio Bravo Wilderness Conservation Area in northwestern Belize. The comfortable lodge and its twelve cabañas are made of local materials and are attractively furnished. From your porch you are likely to see Ocellated Turkey parading through the plaza, hear howler monkeys calling above, and see a Crested Guan crashing through the trees.

The extensive trail network could reveal Great Tinamou, Red-capped Manakin, Royal Flycatcher, and Lovely Cotinga, along with a host of trogons, parrots, and toucans. Finding their tracks, the possibility of sighting secretive wild cats adds to the excitement. You can visit Maya burial chambers with painted friezes still intact, canoe on Laguna Verde, or swim in a nearby stream where you might be joined by a playful River Otter. Chan Chich also has a swimming pool and spa in this exquisite forest setting.

The rich forest here is home to over 350 species of birds, including Ocellated Turkey, Great Curassow, Crested Guan, Ornate Hawk-Eagle, Maya Antthrush, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Royal Flycatcher, and the impossibly cute and often elusive Tody Motmot. It is always a pleasure to be here!

Mammals like Yucatan Black Howler Monkey, Central American Spider Monkey, Central American Agouti, and Gray Fox are commonly seen, and five felines, including Ocelot and Jaguar, have been found here, too. Beautiful hummingbirds like the Purple-crowned Fairy and Long-billed and Stripe-throated Hermits feed in clearings around the cabins, and both Red-capped and White-collared Manakins take berries at fruiting shrubs near the dining room.

As the morning air warms, birds of prey like Bat Falcon, White Hawk, Black Hawk-Eagle, and Plumbeous Kite soar over the cabañas. By January, the bird population is even richer as local nesting birds are joined by numerous migrants: warblers, vireos, orioles, and flycatchers that spend the winter in these rich forests.

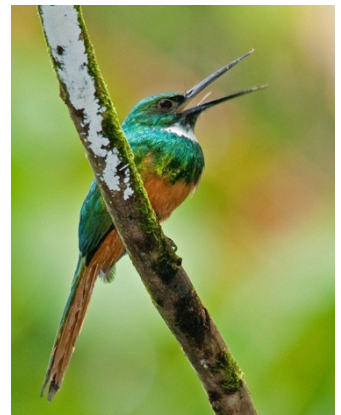
Once settled, we begin our exploration with a short afternoon hike to the Upper Plaza and the King's Tomb Trail. Mounds that have formed over unexcavated ruins provide nest sites for Lesson's Motmot, which are frequently seen around the lodge clearing. Montezuma Oropendola, which nest in colonies around the lodge, are fun to watch as they tumble and gurgle in courtship display.

Accommodations at Chan Chich Lodge (B,L,D)

Wed., Mar. 10 Chan Chich Lodge & Nature Reserve

The nighttime serenade of Common Pauraque quickly blends into a dawn chorus of tinamous, motmots, and perhaps a Strong-billed Woodcreeper, ushering in our early morning walk. With luck we find an assortment of dazzling tropical tanagers, woodpeckers, euphonias, and honeycreepers.

After a delicious breakfast, we venture into the forest, past manakin leks and the territories of dueting Spot-breasted Wren. One trail takes us to a lower open and moist tintal forest where specialties include Rose-throated Tanager, Gray-throated Chat, and Yucatan Flycatcher. On a recent visit to the tintal, a Pheasant Cuckoo sang endlessly. Here we have a greater chance of encountering shy birds like Ruddy Quail-Dove, Great Curassow, and Scaly-throated Leaf Tosser that are unlikely to venture into the lodge clearing.





We break for lunch and perhaps a brief siesta or a swim, then head out in the late afternoon as the forest cools and life stirs. Today we likely explore the River Trail, which skirts wetter habitats. On past tours we've surprised a Tapir enjoying its bath, found both Green and Pygmy Kingfishers and watched delicate hummingbirds come in to drink and bathe.

By 5:30 PM, the afternoon is turning to dusk and we enjoy camaraderie and armchair birding at the lodge's traditional happy hour and dinner. Mealy Parrot and Olive-throated Parakeet are noisy and are seen as they come to their evening roosts.

Accommodations at Chan Chich Lodge (B,L,D)

Thurs., Mar. 11 Chan Chich Lodge & Nature Reserve

Today we have several options to choose from; our agenda is to venture farther afield. We may opt for a motorized excursion, with a visit to an escarpment, good for birds of prey (including Ornate Hawk-Eagle) or visit a lagoon that may produce a Bare-throated Tiger-Heron or Pinnated Bittern. Our local guides that are out regularly can help us make the best decision. On either outing, passing through open country around the town of Gallon Jug, we seek birds like Tropical Pewee, Giant Cowbird, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, and Bat and Laughing Falcons.

We return in the afternoon to enjoy dusk time in the beautiful surroundings, when guans and parrots come in to roost. After dinner, we venture out on a night drive. This is one of the few sites where you may actually see a Jaguar, Jaguarundi, Margay, or Ocelot in the wild. More frequently seen are White-tailed Deer, Northern Tamandua, Four-eyed Opossum, Gray Fox, and birds like Common Pauraque and Northern Potoo.

Accommodations at Chan Chich Lodge (B,L,D)

Fri., Mar. 12 Chan Chich Lodge & Nature Reserve

This morning we walk along the lush Sylvester Village road, which passes through a variety of forest types, good for birds and butterflies (when sunny). This is always a productive walk for elusive species.

In the afternoon we stroll out on the main road leading from the lodge to the suspension bridge over Chan Chich Creek. Here, huge Blue Morpho butterflies flit by, Cinnamon Becard whistle at the roadside, and fruiting trees attract Black-crowned Tityra, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Golden-hooded Tanager, and maybe a wintering Yellow-throated Vireo. Some spotting scope work at the bridge could produce several species of dragonflies and damselflies, including one of the red-eyed dancers or the colorful Caribbean Yellowface.

We return to the lodge for a relaxing final evening and a delicious dinner, with time to recount our trip highlights.

Accommodations at Chan Chich Lodge (B,L,D)



Sat., Mar. 13 Chan Chich Rain Forest Lodge | Departures

Today, we leave Chan Chich and return to Belize City via charter flights out of Gallon Jug. Please schedule return flights for noon onwards, figuring you need to be at the airport 2.5 hours ahead of your flight. Ground transportation (that takes considerably longer than the flight) is possible out from the lodge if you prefer not to fly. (B)

For those opting for the post-tour extension, this morning we head to Flores, where we meet up with our local guide and start this birding adventure. We also meet any travelers coming by flight, starting their Guatemala adventure, as they may select this extension as well.

Tikal / Las Guacamayas Biological Station Post-tour Extension

Sat., Mar. 13 Tikal

En route to Jungle Lodge, our lodgings on the edge of the ruins, we visit the beautiful Yaxha area, located 40 miles from the airport. Yaxha, always an ally of Tikal, has imposing pyramids and is all connected with causeways. It is also within the Maya Biosphere Reserve and located near the Yaxha Lake. The site is part of the National Park Yaxhá-Nakúm-Naranjo, which protects lowland rainforest. It is birdy here, as well as fascinating from a cultural perspective—a good start to seeing a host of new species in this lush habitat. Birds we might see include Slaty-tailed and Gartered Trogon, Red-lored and White-fronted Parrot, Blue Bunting and Keel-billed Toucan – our first taste of birding in the wet Central American lowlands.

Accommodations at Jungle Lodge, Tikal National Park (B,L,D)

Sun., Mar. 14 Tikal National Park

Protected as a national park in 1955, Tikal preserves the most magnificent example of pyramids, plazas, and temples of the ancient Mayan culture. With towering pyramids that reach more than 240 feet, one cannot understand how impressive they are without being in their presence. Once the epicenter of Mayan commerce and trade, Tikal's towering pyramids stretch towards the heaven and beyond the highest jungle canopy, providing a mystical view of the area's rich flora and fauna.

In addition to its rich architecture and archeology, Tikal encompasses more than 3 million acres of rainforest in northern Guatemala's Mayan Biosphere Reserve. In fact, UNESCO designates Tikal as a World Heritage Site based on both its incredible biodiversity as well as its historical heritage. More than 400 species of birds have been found within Tikal National Park, including exceptional numbers of parrots and raptors. While walking through the forest, visiting the different archaeological groups with plazas, pyramids, and palaces, Howler and Spider Monkeys, and showy birds like Squirrel Cuckoo, Keel-billed Toucan, and Ocellated Turkey are also moving around. We enjoy lunch at a local restaurant inside the park, and then you have the option to continue exploring. If you find yourself wanting a siesta, our hotel is just outside the gate!

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We spend the day wandering through the jungle among the famous ruins, learning about Mayan history with time for birding. The archeological zone of Tikal is large, magnificent, and worthy of additional exploration. Mornings and evenings can be very active with the cacophony of commuting parrots, including Brown-hooded, White-crowned, Red-lored, White-fronted, and Mealy Parrot. We also pay attention to what is soaring above us, and we may see Hook-billed, Plumbeous, and Swallow-tailed Kite, perhaps even Ornate or Black Hawk-Eagle!

Accommodations at Jungle Lodge, Tikal National Park (B,L,D)

Mon., Mar. 15 Transfer to Las Guacamayas

We begin our journey to the remote El Tigre National Park and Las Guacamayas Biological Station today. The dirt road we travel passes through wetlands and several villages until we reach the last village, Paso Caballos; these villages and wetlands are often fantastic for a variety of birds of secondary habitats. White-tailed Kite, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Vermilion Flycatcher, Purple Gallinule, Northern Jacana, Limpkin, Snail Kite, and more are all possible. From this community, we take a 25-minute boat ride along the San Pedro River to Las Guacamayas Biological Station. Upon arrival, we receive a presentation on the conservation, environmental, and social programs offered by the biological station.

Although one might expect a research station to be quite basic, this wonderful gem offers great accommodations and excellent food. After a flavorful lunch, we enjoy free time in the garden to observe and photograph wildlife. The hummingbird feeders often attract Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, White-bellied Emerald, and Wedge-tailed Sabrewing. In the late afternoon, we travel along the scenic Sacluc River in search of Agami Heron, American Pygmy Kingfisher, and Sungrebe along its forested banks. For those that choose to attend the night boat excursion, we have an excellent chance of seeing Morelet's Crocodile, Northern Potoo, Boat-billed Heron, and Mottled Owl.

Accommodations at Las Guacamayas Biological Station (B,L,D)



Tues., Mar. 16 Las Guacamayas Biological Station

After coffee and a light breakfast, we bird and explore by boat up to the Waka' Perú Archaeological Site. Sitting atop an escarpment in El Tigre National Park, this site was once the capital of a Maya city-state and a major trading center between 500 and 800 AD. Today, the area hosts an important population of Scarlet Macaw. A relatively flat trail goes through Mayan rainforest, along which we hope to see various forest species such as Black-headed Trogon, Tody Motmot, White-whiskered Puffbird, Chestnut-colored Woodpecker, White-collared Manakin, and Black-throated Shrike-Tanager.

We head back to the station for a delicious lunch and some down time before heading back out again to look for birds around the lodge and a nearby lookout tower. Green-backed Sparrow, Red-capped Manakin, Yellow-winged Tanager, Black-faced (Mayan) Antthrush, and Yellow-tailed Oriole are just a few of the possibilities!

Accommodations at Las Guacamayas Biological Station (B,L,D)

Weds., Mar. 17 Flores

After breakfast, we travel along the Sacluc River near sunrise today, exploring the riverside rainforest and oak savannahs for birds we may have not yet seen (or wish to see better). Parrots like Brown-hooded, White-crowned, Red-lored, and White-fronted should be very active overhead. By traveling along the river in the early morning, we maximize our chances to see secretive wetland birds like Sungrebe and Agami Heron. In areas where there are oaks, the colorful and inquisitive Yucatan Jay is often present.

After one last lunch at the biological station, we transfer back to Flores for the night to position ourselves for tomorrow's flight.

Accommodations in Flores (B,L,D)

Thurs., Mar. 18 Departures

For flights, book departures that best work to your connecting flights home. You can book an open-jaw or multi-city ticket if times work better for that. Our travel agent, Pam Davis, can help and we pay your ticket fee.

Guide James P. Smith



James brings some twenty-five years of guiding experience to Naturalist Journeys. Originally from Sheffield in the United Kingdom, he discovered a love for guiding in Israel in 1995 where he helped establish the Kibbutz Lotan Center for Birdwatching in the Southern Arava Valley. Since then, he's led hundreds of tours throughout the Northern Hemisphere for a number of UK-based tour companies. His trips to Israel and North America are especially close to his heart but he's also led or co-led tours to Mexico (Veracruz), The Gambia, Kenya, Iceland, Scottish Highlands, Spanish Pyrenees, Central/Southern France, Greece (Lesvos), and India (Goa). An accomplished illustrator, James placed runner-up in the British Birds "Bird Illustrator of the Year" competition in 1992 and went on to have his work published in numerous birding magazines and

journals. He also co-authored the two volume set *A Guide to the Birding Hotspots of Israel* (Published in 2000 by the Israel Ornithological Center and the S.P.N.I.). He returns to Israel every year to lead trips and remains an active member of the Israel Rarities and Distribution Committee.

Cost of the Journey

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Please note, starting in January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Travel Information

Please plan to make air travel plans only after the minimum group size has been reached—Naturalist Journeys will contact you when the tour is confirmed. Please arrive in Belize City at the Philip SW Goldson International Airport no later than 2:00 PM on March 6.

Please note that for the departure date, we are a short charter flight away from the International Airport, but it is best to plan outbound flights no earlier than NOON on March 13. If you find a flight close to noon, please inquire. If staying on in Belize, we can help you make plans. If staying on for the Tikal extension, please book flights that best suit your connecting flights back to your home city on March 18.

Naturalist Journeys, LLC is an equal opportunity service provider and committed to the goal of ensuring equal opportunity for all in employment and program delivery.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey is \$3890 DBL / \$4770 SGL per person, based on double occupancy, from Belize City. Cost of the Tikal extension is \$2265 DBL / \$2490 SGL

Cost includes: all accommodations; all meals as stated in the itinerary (*B,L,D*); group airport transfers; in-country charter flights, ground transportation within Belize between two lodges; professional guide services; park, preserve, and other activity fees; lodge tips; and miscellaneous program expenses.

Tour price does not include: roundtrip airfare to and from Belize City or items of a personal nature such as laundry, portorage, telephone charges, or alcoholic beverages, gratuities for maids or porters.

Photo Credits

Amazon Kingfisher, Barry Ulman (BU); Ornate Hawk-Eagle, Bill Fraser (BF); Ocelot, Don Cooper; Collared Aracari, Peg Abbott (PA); Morelet's Crocodile, PA; Ocellated Turkey, PA; Central American Spider Monkey, PA; Lesser Nighthawk, PA; Jabiru, BU; King Vulture, BF; White-whiskered Puffbird, PA; Purple Gallinule, Tom Dove (TD); Naturalist Journeys Group at Lamanai Ruins, Naturalist Journeys Stock; Keel-billed Toucan, PA; Boat-billed Herons, TD; Barred Forest Falcon, Narca Moore-Craig; Chan Chich, courtesy Chan Chich; Lovely Cotinga, James Adams; Rufous-tailed Jacamar, TD; Tody Motmot, PA; Crested Guan, Sandy Sorkin; White Hawk, Robert Gallardo; Yucatan Black Howler Monkey, PA; Montezuma Oropendola, TD; Keel-billed Toucan, Doug Greenberg; Tikal x2, Lori Conrad; Central American Spider Monkey, PA; Squirrel Cuckoo, courtesy OL.